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ABSTRACT

In view of the extremely high turnover among corporation recruits, there is growing and justified interest in having organizations identify the causes of turnover and possible ways of reducing it. Many studies have examined different variables related to turnover, including organizational commitment, career commitment, job satisfaction, and employee characteristics. The major purpose of this study was to examine employee turnover using demographic variables and work-related variables in a sample of mental health workers. Data were collected at two time periods. At Time 1, mental health workers (N=155) from 32 agencies from the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation in the State of Tennessee completed a survey. Based on data collected at Time 1, a follow-up survey was distributed to directors of the 32 agencies for whom the mental health workers at Time 1 worked. After two follow-up surveys, 84 workers were classified as either still on the staff (N=62), voluntary turnover (N=20), and fired (N=2). Since this study focused on voluntary turnover the fired employees were excluded from data analysis. Subjects in the final analysis were then labeled as either stayers (N=62) or leavers (N=20). The results of the investigation showed that leavers tended to have lower tenure, lower stress, lower commitment, higher income, and higher intrinsic job satisfaction than stayers. In order to reduce turnover, it appears that the only way area managers in personnel and human resource management may find some success is to increase employees' commitment in an organization. (ABL)

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Factors Related to Turnover Among Mental Health Workers

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Running head: TURNOVER

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Abstract

Questionnaire data were collected from 155 mental health and mental retardation workers at Time 1. At Time 2, 18 months later, 82 workers were classified as either stayers ($n = 62$) or leavers ($n = 20$). The results of a discriminant analysis showed that leavers tend to have shorter tenure, higher income, lower commitment, lower stress, and higher intrinsic job satisfaction than stayers.

Factors Related to Turnover Among Mental Health Workers

It has been suggested that "the average corporation can count on losing 50% of its college recruits within five years" (Rowan, 1981, p. 54). Therefore, there is a growing and justified concern for organizations to identify the causes of turnover and possible ways of reducing turnover (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

Many studies have examined different variables related to turnover, for example, organizational commitment (Blau & Boal, 1987; Huselid & Day, 1991), career commitment (Bedeian, Kemery, & Pizzolatto, 1991), job satisfaction (Lee, 1988; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979), and employee characteristics (Mowday, Porter, & Stone, 1978). The major purpose of the present study was to examine employees' turnover using demographic variables and work-related variables in a sample of mental health workers.

Method

Subjects

Data were collected at two time periods. At Time 1, a questionnaire was distributed to 40 agencies (275 employees) of the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation in the State of Tennessee. These mental health workers participated in the study voluntarily. After several telephone follow-ups to the directors of these agencies, 155 subjects (32 agencies) completed the survey. The response rate was 56.36 percent.

Based on data collected at Time 1, 112 subjects provided identification numbers on their answer sheets. At Time 2, 18 months after the original data collection, a follow-up survey was distributed to these 32 agencies. Directors of these agencies were

asked to indicate the employment status of their specific employees who completed the survey at Time 1. Several agencies have moved without forwarding addresses, therefore, these agencies were deleted from our Time 2 data. After two follow-up surveys, 84 workers were classified as either (1) still on the staff ($n = 62$), (2) left the organization (voluntary turnover, $n = 20$), and (3) fired (involuntary turnover, $n = 2$). The response rate at Time 2 was 75.00 percent.

The focus of the present study was on voluntary turnover. Thus, employees in the involuntary turnover group ($n = 2$) were excluded in the data analysis. Subjects in the final analysis were then labeled as either stayers ($n = 62$) or leavers ($n = 20$), the major classification (dependent) variable of the present study.

Measures

Employees' demographic variables such as workers' tenure in the organization and annual income were measured. Further work-related variables, i.e., organization-based self-esteem (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989), attitudes toward money (Money Ethic Scale, Tang, 1992, 1993), work-related stress (based on Steers, 1989), employee commitment (Romzek, 1989), and intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction (Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967) were employed using a 5-point scale.

Results

A discriminant analysis was conducted using workers' survey measures at Time 1 to predict their status in the organization (stayers vs. leavers) at Time 2. The results showed that employees

with short tenure, high income, low commitment, low stress, and high intrinsic job satisfaction tended to leave the organization 18 months later [Wilks' lambda = .758]. The classification results showed that 76.81 percent of the subjects could be predicted accurately [Chi-squared (5) = 17.30, p = .004]. The canonical correlation was .49. Therefore, the amount of variance can be explained by these five variables at Time 2 was 24.2 percent.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of these five variables for stayers and leavers and pooled within-groups correlations between discriminant variables and canonical discriminant functions. This correlation is a measure of relative impact on discriminability.

Discussion

The results of this investigation show that leavers tend to have lower tenure, lower stress, lower commitment, higher income, and higher intrinsic job satisfaction than stayers. First, these results seem to support the view that employees in the human services sector tend to experience a high level of burnout. These mental health workers may continue to have direct contacts with people in need of aid and to experience stress on the job. Thus, the type of people who stay in this profession is a reflection of their self-selection process.

Second, it is plausible that leavers tend to change their jobs very frequently in order to improve their income and their

financial situation. Leavers also have lower tenure on the job than stayers. Therefore, leavers do not have a lot of invested side bets in the organization (Becker, 1960). They may experience a lower level of personal sacrifice when they leave the organization than stayers (Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990). It is reasonable to expect that leavers probably do not internalize the stress and the problems on the job. Thus, leavers also have a high level of intrinsic job satisfaction.

Third, based on the results of the discriminant analysis, employees who have lower tenure, lower stress, lower commitment, higher income, and higher intrinsic job satisfaction are leaving. Over the years, managers in personnel and human resource management have tried very hard to reduce stress, pay employees fairly, and increase intrinsic job satisfaction. In order to reduce turnover, the only area managers in personnel and human resource management may find some success is to increase employees' commitment in an organization. It appears that managers' ability to reducing mental health workers' turnover behavior is quite limited.

Stayers do not differ from leavers on their attitudes toward money. Further studies in this area are needed. Finally, the present findings are based on a small sample of mental health workers. A caution is warranted for generalizing the present findings to different samples and occupations.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations For Stayers and Leavers

Variable	Stayers		Leavers		Correlation ^a
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	
1. Tenure	59.90	49.03	26.76	33.14	.50
2. Income	16377.17	6445.19	20489.41	17667.80	-.23
3. Commitment	37.19	6.60	33.59	7.43	.38
4. Stress	33.59	8.62	30.88	7.89	.28
5. MSQ-Int	49.43	6.80	50.41	5.64	-.18

^a
Note. Pooled within-groups correlations between
discriminating variables and canonical discriminant functions.